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➤HEBRAICA.◀

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THE PURPOSE OF HEBRAICA.

BY WILLIAM R. HARPER.

I.

The study of the Hebrew language, except for distinctly theological uses, and the study of the other Semitic languages, except for the assistance derived from them for the Hebrew, receive but slight attention at the hands of American scholars. These studies are carried on almost exclusively in the divinity hall, where they are necessarily secondary. Nor even here are they emphasized as they deserve. The time of both instructor and student is occupied largely in the discussion of questions strictly theological. Discussions of a philological nature are neither required, nor expected. The professor is crowded with work of one kind or another; he cannot engage in original investigations. The time at his disposal is short. It must be given to the Old Testament, and not to Hebrew. He cannot afford to be a professor of language merely. He studies the language, only so far as he is obliged to do so, to fit himself for a tolerable performance of his duties as a theological instructor. He teaches the rudiments of the language a few hours a week during a portion of the Junior year. The remainder of the course, so far as concerns Hebrew, is given to exegesis, an exercise in which, because of the lack of preparation for it on the part of the pupil, the professor works, while the student rests.

Is there no work to be done in Semitic philology? When we remember that America has yet to produce a Hebrew lexicon, that almost nothing is accessible on the subject of Hebrew synonyms, that the meaning of a large number of Hebrew words is as yet not satisfactorily determined, that for our grammars and for our texts we must go to England and Germany, that no comparative Semitic grammar has yet appeared, that practical text-books for the study of Chaldee, Syriac, Ethiopic, Arabic and Assyrian are yet to be written, that we have no texts of separate books edited with notes, that no genuine work in textual criticism has yet been done, that the texts of the ancient versions are in a deplorable state, that great and important questions in Semitic ethnology are yet unsettled, that biblical chronology is a matter of the greatest uncertainty, that a critical Introduction in English to the Old Testament, is demanded by the times,—when we recall these facts, we realize certainly that there is work to be done. And that it is a great and growing work, will not be questioned by those who, for a moment, reflect. Who will do this work, if not the Professors of Hebrew? Is it not demanded of

the men who occupy the Old Testament chairs of our theological seminaries that they throw themselves with energy into these literary and philological fields, and not devote all their strength to "discussions as to technical minutiae of the Jewish schoolmen?" Shall not American scholars take hold of this work, in larger numbers and with greater zeal than ever before?

HEBRAICA will endeavor to furnish a medium for the publication of some of the results of this study. It will aim to serve as a means of inter-communication between scholars engaged in the various departments of Semitic work. It will particularly encourage original investigation. Its pages will be open to the discussion of all topics relating to the Semitic languages, literature, or history. It will urge those whose profession calls them to undertake the investigation of such topics to do their duty in this matter by using the opportunities afforded them, to render a valuable and a lasting service to the cause of higher education and learning.

II.

That Christian ministers ought to know Hebrew, is a generally accepted truth. It is necessary now in but few cases to enlarge upon the reasons for this study. In the case of those clergymen who do not have at least some knowledge of the language, it may be supposed that they earnestly desire it, and, indeed, would have it, but for unfavorable circumstances in the past or present. One will not go far wrong in saying that at least *eighty* out of every hundred ministers are alive to the importance of this subject. Of these eighty, however, not more than *ten*, probably, endeavor to do any systematic or consecutive work. Of the remaining *seventy*, there are *ten*, not more, who may reasonably satisfy themselves that they ought not to do such work. These are men who are physically or mentally unable. After deducting from every hundred cases, *twenty* who are not sufficiently interested in their work to make that preparation for it which may justly be regarded as indispensable, *ten* who may be supposed to be carrying on such study, and *ten* who may reasonably be excused from it, there remain *sixty*, who will confess that such study is desirable, and, indeed, necessary, yet do not undertake it. These sixty men have either commenced the study and dropped it, or they have never taken it up. In the former case, they may have had an instructor, who was a scholar, and an exegete, but not a teacher; or, a sufficient amount of time may not have been given in the curriculum of study to this department, and hence they did not attain that degree of knowledge which would have enabled them to carry on the study without further assistance; or, they may have regarded the study as of no importance, and consequently have shirked it at every possible opportunity. In the latter case, they may have entered the ministry without the ordinary preparation, laboring under the delusion, that without their immediate help the Kingdom of God must perish; or, they may have studied in the seminary, everything but the Bible.

Whatever be the reason assigned, the fact remains that sixty ministers out of every hundred, although they ought to have a living acquaintance with this language, and acknowledge this to be so, and desire the same, yet do not have it, and take no steps toward obtaining it. And why? Because they have formed a distaste for the study and cannot overcome it; or, because they are pressed with other claims of a more immediate nature, and have not the will-power needed to push them to one side; or, because they find it difficult to carry on such study alone and cannot, in the nature of the case, withdraw from their work to attend

a school where instruction may be obtained ; or, because they have not had that encouragement which was needed to bring them to decide to undertake the study.

HEBRAICA will endeavor to interest these ministers, sixty out of every hundred, more deeply in the study of Hebrew ; to stimulate them, if possible, to engage in such study, and to aid them, if possible, in its prosecution. These things it will aim to do by publishing words of incitement and encouragement from men who are in the midst of the work, and by means of actual help, afforded in the pages of the Journal, toward a better understanding of the principles and structure of that language in which is written three-fourths of God's revelation to man.

III.

Hebrew being a professional study, and being taught, consequently, only in the theological seminary, it might be supposed that a reasonable amount of time would be given that department in connection with which it is studied, that the best methods would be adopted by those who give this instruction, and that at least a fair knowledge of the language be gained by those who undertake the study. What are the facts ?

(1) The time spent in the entire Old Testament department, in the majority of our seminaries, is not quite equivalent to that which is spent in the study of Latin or Greek during two years of a preparatory course. Classes average one recitation a day, for four days in the week. In the course, about two hundred and ninety hours of recitation are included. If the same amount of time were spent consecutively it would amount to about four and a half or five months of work. During this time, the student must master the Hebrew language, of which at the beginning of his course he is wholly ignorant ; he must also learn the Aramaic, and must read as large a portion as possible of the Hebrew Bible. He must, likewise, become acquainted with the geography and archaeology of Palestine. The ancient versions of the Old Testament must receive some attention. A thorough grounding must be received in the three great sub-departments, Old Testament Hermeneutics, Old Testament Introduction, Old Testament Theology. To the department of the New Testament, the same amount of time is given, although the student is, from the beginning, thoroughly versed in the language which forms the basis of work. It is true, also, that the matter to be studied, although in some respects confessedly more important, covers but one-third as much ground, and is of a nature far less difficult. (2) Of the time spent in the Old Testament department, short as it is, probably not one-third is usually given to work of a linguistic character. The teaching of the principles of the language is regarded as drudgery. Few instructors take much interest in it. The work assigned from day to day is a task, burdensome alike to pupil and teacher. These tasks are prepared, but in many cases, only because they are required. The class is hurried into exegesis. Three chapters of Genesis, in some cases, have been painfully gone through with, when the Psalms, or Job, or one of the minor Prophets is taken up. From this time, the work is of a theological character and no longer linguistic. Is it supposed that the study of exegesis can be carried on with no adequate knowledge of the original language ? (3) When we consider then the small amount of time given to the study of Hebrew and the injudicious method followed by many teachers in the study, we may be prepared for the statement that only a very small proportion of our seminary graduates take away with them a respectable knowledge of the language. This will pass undisputed. Theological students

not seldom sell their Hebrew books. Few ministers, as stated above, give any time to this study. We have a comparatively small number of Semitic scholars in our country. The Semitic work is being done in Germany. Is this as it should be?

That the present constitution of our seminaries is perfect is not to be supposed. Within a decade, great changes have been made in regard to these very matters. Instead of one man performing the labor of both Old and New Testaments, two men now perform that service; and in the more wealthy seminaries, an associate professor also is appointed. There is still room for advance. Much can be gained by the judicious use of better methods. At all events, either more instruction must be given the student, and greater acquisitions made by him; or the study of the Old Testament in the original tongues must be given up. In eight cases out of ten, the time spent by theological students in the study of Hebrew is time lost.

HEBRAICA will endeavor to increase the interest in Hebrew study among theological students; and it will work to advance the interests of that department in the theological seminary which has too often been regarded as the least important, and which has suffered greatly from indifference and neglect.

IV.

Universities and many colleges aim to teach everything. Almost no department of study is unrepresented in the curriculum. It is true, however, that with two or three notable exceptions, Semitic languages have no place. The literature, which of all literatures, has most influenced human thought and action, the history of the people to whom the world is indebted for its religion, that family of languages which is second in importance only to the family of which our own tongue is a member,—the Bible, Jewish history, and the Semitic languages pass unnoticed. This is a condition of things which should not long continue. It is not the place here to assign reasons why these subjects should be recognized in the University and College curriculum, at least as electives. Nor is there space to show why the theological seminary should not be left alone to do a work, which can no longer be regarded as strictly professional. It is sufficient to say, that if America is to perform her share in the great and important departments now, for the first, opening up in the remote districts of the East, if American scholars are to be prepared to take their part in deciding the vital questions that have arisen concerning the integrity of the Old Testament, if American scholarship is to take an active part in that rapidly developing science, the Science of Comparative Religion, surely Oriental studies, and particularly Semitic studies, must be introduced into the curriculum of non-professional schools. These studies must be encouraged in a more active manner than they have ever been. Instruction must be provided for those who desire it. Investigation must be encouraged on the part of those who have the ability and the taste for it.

What HEBRAICA can accomplish in this direction, it will do. Such changes in the established order of things are always slow. But if this is a thing to be done, it will in time be accomplished. If those who believe that Hebrew should be taught in colleges would but unite in an effort to introduce the study, they would soon succeed, for the number would be large and influential. It is possible that such a union of effort may be obtained. This, it will be understood, is one of the purposes for which HEBRAICA has been instituted.

V.

Within three years there has been organized and carried into successful operation a School for the study of Hebrew by Correspondence. This School, at this writing, includes over six hundred clergymen and students. The members of the School are of every evangelical denomination. They reside in almost every State in the Union, in Canada, in England, in Scotland, in Ireland, in Turkey, in China, in Japan, in India. Their sole aim in this work is to attain a thorough acquaintance with the Hebrew language. They are interested in all that pertains to this department of study. They desire aid which is not to be found in dictionaries and grammars. They will appreciate and obtain profit from the discussion of topics, as it comes fresh from the hands of instructors and students. They feel bound together by a common tie. For this class of men, as well as for those clergymen and students who are to-day carrying on regular and systematic study by themselves, HEBRAICA is intended. If rightly conducted, it cannot but prove to them invaluable.

To furnish a medium for the discussion of Semitic topics by Semitic scholars, to encourage and aid those who are in the ministry to engage in Semitic study, to advance, if possible, the interests, and to increase the efficiency of the Old Testament department in our various seminaries, to advocate the introduction of Semitic studies into our Universities and Colleges, and to form a bond of connection between the widely scattered members of the Hebrew Correspondence School, HEBRAICA is sent forth. May it not receive the sympathy and cooperation of all who have at heart the cause of higher learning?

THE HIGHER CRITICISM, A WITNESS TO THE CREDIBILITY OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE.

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Not a few orthodox theologians in Europe, very many in England and America, see in the application of the so-called Higher Criticism to the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, a danger to the faith, and consequently by principle stand aloof from all such work.

Now, it is indeed noteworthy, that the Higher Criticism has had its origin and first accomplishment mostly through suggestions which have come from those who were heterodox. It were easy to enumerate many examples. In this periodical devoted to the study of the Old Testament and the Hebrew Language, I give only three of the many names well known in the history of the Pentateuch criticism: *Thomas Hobbes*, whom Thorschmid* has called the "grand-father of all free-thinkers in England," the author of the "*Leviathan, or the Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth*," etc. (London, 1651, Part III., chap. 33); the inventor of the strange Pre-Adamite hypothesis, *Isaac la Peyrere* (*Systema theologicum ex Præadamitarum hypotesi*, 1655 [*sine loco*], IV., cap. 1); and the Jewish

* "Versuch einer vollstaendigen Engellaendischen Freydenkerbibliothek, 1765-67."